

# Joint Task Forces

Refugees near  
Goma, Zaire.

## and Preemptive Response

By EDWIN P. SMITH

**T**oday U.S. and multinational forces must respond to crises around the world and across the conflict spectrum. Such challenges are often initially defined by the media. Responding forces thus must enter information age battles with non-lethal but critical fires against multiple targets. The outcomes can establish the political-military context for all actions that follow.

A joint task force activated to respond to a crisis must first determine actual contingency-response requirements—whether the assigned mission is derived from an established operational

plan or a new situation in the area of responsibility of a unified command. If the effort is quick and everyone in the objective area agrees on the initial response, a lethal, protracted conflict may be averted. Multinational military assets may not be needed. That situation occurred during a U.S. European Command (EUCOM) contingency in central Africa. The operation taught lessons about tactics, techniques, and procedures related to preventing conflict and conserving resources.

Operation Guardian Assistance involved deploying joint forces from EUCOM in late 1996. They were sent initially as a humanitarian assistance survey team, which later formed the core of the Joint Task Force Guardian Assistance (JTFGA) staff. The first survey team personnel were tasked

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DOD (Andy Dunaway)

Soldiers guarding  
airport entry point.

to assess the need for participation by the Armed Forces in eastern Zaire and Rwanda.

The principal lessons dealt with understanding, defining, and dominating the information environment. From the first assessment carried out in the field in preparation for the U.N. steering committee meeting on requirements for a multinational force, accurate and timely information was essential for resource decisions. The task force made a major contribution in that process.

### Setting the Stage

Events in September 1996 revealed a sharp increase in violence and discrimination by the Armed Forces of Zaire (FAZ) and the Former Armed Forces of Rwanda (EXFAR) on the eastern Zairian plateau, west of Lake Kivu. The major indigenous group was Tutsi, many descended from Rwandan Tutsis who migrated there some three hundred years earlier.

In April 1994, a bomb destroyed an aircraft carrying both Rwandan President Habyarimana (a Hutu) and Burundi President Ntaryamira. While

no group was ever proven responsible for this act, the deaths sparked mass killing of moderate Hutus and of Tutsis by enraged Hutus. When the violence was ended months later by the Tutsi-led, Ugandan-supported Rwandan Patri-

otic Army (RPA), half a million people had died and over a million Hutus had fled to Zaire. Among the refugees were many people who had been directly responsible for genocide or connected with the former Hutu interim government.

With this tide of humanity came weapons in unprecedented numbers (from EXFAR and its

suppliers). Free access to arms coupled with continuous cross-border operations into Rwanda molded EXFAR into a serious regional security threat, particularly to the government of Rwanda.

EXFAR operated from camps along the Zairian-Rwandan border. Ease of movement from this area allowed the force to conduct hit-and-run raids in Rwanda and melt back into the refugee population to be resupplied from stocks of humanitarian aid. Zairian troops were either unwilling or unable to stop these attacks, prompting warnings of military action from Rwanda.

In mid-October 1996 Zairian Tutsis, the *Banayamulenge*, began probing attacks against isolated FAZ units and civilian targets southwest of Bukavu. They struck Uvira in the south and Rutshuru north of Goma in a coordinated offensive, supported by RPA and loosely by the Uganda People's Defense Force. FAZ resistance crumbled as their unpaid, undisciplined troops became an unruly rabble looting their way north to Goma and south to Bukavu.

Camps in the path of the advancing conflict were fragmented as their occupants fled. Hutu refugees from Rwanda feared Tutsi retribution for the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda. Camps north of Bukavu and south of Rutshuru eventually emptied as the refugees converged near Goma. An estimated 800,000 refugees crowded into a large complex, the biggest camp being Mugunga.

EXFAR established arms caches and command hubs at Mugunga where a labyrinth of tents and refugees provided perfect cover for insurgents. Increasingly reported in the media, moreover, was an emergency humanitarian crisis involving hundreds of thousands of refugees who allegedly were being held against their will, dying of starvation, and unable to help themselves.

After an exchange of EXFAR mortar and Banayamulenge rocket fire on November 9, most refugees in Mugunga chose an uncertain fate at the Rwandan border over certain death at the hands of EXFAR. Some 600,000 broke with EXFAR and streamed towards the Goma corridor.

### Mission Starting Point

On November 1, 1996 the Chairman issued a directive to develop a tactical plan to facilitate relief operations and voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees. As with all EUCOM operations, Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command (CINCEUR), provided clear planning guidance and stressed thorough staff analyses, from mission statement to rules of engagement.

After its initial analysis, the EUCOM staff provided the following mission statement to the

**refugees had been directly responsible for genocide or connected with the former Hutu interim government**



Navy surveillance  
aircraft in Uganda.



DOD (Barbara Burfeind)

U.S. Army Southern European Task Force (SETAF) for tactical plan development:

*When directed, EUCOM will conduct military operations in eastern Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi in support of U.N.-directed humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. EUCOM will provide only unique military capabilities to alleviate acute humanitarian crises. If required, establish [a civil-military operations cell (CMOC)] to transition all support to U.N. agencies and [nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations].*

CINCEUR also provided the following intent statement:

*Rapidly assess the situation and recommend usage of unique U.S. military capabilities; complement/supplement designated U.N./civilian-led agencies, minimizing the requirement for U.S. military forces; utilize, to the maximum extent possible, the capabilities of contractors and non-DOD organizations; establish clear and achievable objectives; coordinate through the National Command Authorities for the employment of military force; transition and/or terminate support and redeploy; at all times, exercise the inherent obligation to protect U.S. forces; success is achieved when objectives are met or conditions requiring U.S. military assistance no longer exist.*

The SETAF commander was also assigned to develop a mission statement and composition of the EUCOM survey team, which was to be ready to deploy to central Africa on order.

On receiving a second planning order from the Chairman on November 8, the new survey

team, led by the SETAF commander, deployed November 13 to Entebbe in Uganda and met with officials from the government and the country team at the American Embassy in Kampala, Uganda. The following day it moved to Kigali, Rwanda, to meet government and nongovernment officials and continue assessing the crisis. Its initial force recommendations, forwarded within four days of arrival, helped determine both the size and scope of U.S. involvement. In addition, its assessment prompted a new mission analysis to address the changing situation on the ground.

The task force that would soon be deployed would be significantly smaller than planned. For example, the first SETAF/EUCOM troop-to-task analysis indicated the possible need for attack helicopters and combat ground forces. In light of the changed situation in eastern Zaire and the assessment by the survey team, the task force actually deployed primarily command and control, communications, intelligence, and logistical elements to support what was to become a series of information age close-in battles among many competing interest groups, to be known as Operation Guardian Assistance.

## Early Planning

Initial planning conducted at Kelley Barracks in Germany and at Longare in Italy identified three probable bases for the humanitarian assistance survey team and joint task force operation: an intermediate staging base located at Entebbe, a forward operating base at Kigali, and the objective area—probably near Goma, Zaire.

The first mission essential tasks were:

- conduct assessment and identify requirements in support of the humanitarian assistance operations of the U.N. High Commission on Refugees, nongovernmental organizations, and private volunteer organizations in central Africa
- deploy forces into the joint operational area
- establish and protect intermediate stage base/forward operating base objective area forces
- establish CMOC interfaces
- execute security and facilitation tasks toward reestablishment of humanitarian operations wholesale distribution nodes
- position forces to hand over security/facilitation tasks to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, nongovernmental organizations, and private voluntary organizations.

As each task was identified, an endstate and objective measures of effectiveness were developed to gauge progress toward mission task completion and handover of residual responsibilities.

Early planning called for the Air Force and main headquarters to proceed to the intermediate stage base in Entebbe. The forward headquarters, CMOC, and associated security forces were to establish operations at the forward operating base in Kigali. And an infantry force

would prepare to secure warehouse distribution centers near Goma and furnish local security for nongovernmental organizations, and private voluntary organizations. However, the survey team assessment did not indicate the need for an operating base in Goma. With the November 15 exodus from Mugunga, the requirement to provide security for nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations also had diminished.

The changed refugee situation prompted a new crisis-action planning cycle by the task force staff at Entebbe with updated tasks: determine mission requirements based on input from Rwandan government and humanitarian relief agencies, continue to deploy appropriate forces for execution, establish an appropriate command and control (C<sup>2</sup>) architecture, continue CMOC operations from the forward operating base in Kigali, inform and assist Rwanda in executing a synchronized information campaign, and conduct task handover on completing the mission.

There were two significant shifts in mission focus from the humanitarian assistance survey team planning phase conducted at Kelley and Longare and an assessment conducted on the ground. On completing the initial evaluation, U.S. efforts were intended to directly support the government of Rwanda as lead agency in the humanitarian assistance and repatriation operations. Also, rather than static and mobile security for relief agencies, the joint task force was to provide information to the local government and relief agencies on issues such as refugee locations, size, and directions of movement in eastern Zaire. Based on this new analysis, the primary JTF effort at Kigali became advisory assistance.

Initial humanitarian assistance survey team planning on November 4–13 identified the need for a JTF task organization of some 3,000 people, not including the tanker airlift control element. Within it were security forces and a forcible-entry capability to gain access to Goma.

The original task organization was established with Army, Air Force, joint psychological operations, and joint special operations components. CMOC was a separate function under the JTF staff and had a support role. However, as the mission evolved the entire joint task force was sized at under 400 personnel. Its new role became information enabler to Rwanda and relief agencies rather than a substitute for relief agencies.

Although the task organization remained service-component oriented, the internal structure of the joint headquarters changed. The Air Force used a tailored air operations cell rather than a joint forces air component commander element. The joint special operations task force consisted of a communications team and AC-130 for reconnaissance. CMOC was provided by the Army under the JTF headquarters. Moreover, the Navy prepositioned P-3 reconnaissance aircraft in the operational area. It conducted operations prior to deployment of the humanitarian assistance survey team and came under the operational control of the joint task force upon its activation on November 19.

Moreover, the headquarters structure and subordinate commands were reduced over time, applying a lesson from Operation Support Hope in 1994: as a function ends, its resources should be redeployed. The chief of staff monitored mission task completion and made recommendations on redeployment. Thus task force strength within the area of operations was kept to a minimum. In addition, liaison officers from France, Britain, Canada, and Italy monitored the assessment made by the survey team and task force operations.

**initial survey team planning identified the need for a JTF task organization of some 3,000 people**



Unloading relief supplies from C-5B.

DOD (Charles Parshtey)

### Operations around Kigali

The initial humanitarian assistance survey team and task force center of gravity was Kigali, where the Rwandan government was based and most relief agencies had Rwandan offices. After the survey team assessment and task force activation, JTFGA identified unique requirements in support of the local government and relief agencies involved in humanitarian assistance and repatriation. JTF immediately established a CMOC operation to do this.

At first, the relief agencies wanted military forces to separate belligerents in refugee camps, disarm criminals, and provide security for operations in eastern Zaire. However, some requests became moot once the refugees began returning to Rwanda. By November 19 it was apparent that Rwanda and the relief agencies only required accurate information on the size, location, and direction of refugee movements.

One reason there were few other military requirements was the aggressive humanitarian operations-repatriation preparations by the local government and relief agencies in Rwanda since the 1994 crisis. In 1996 they were ready with a coordinated and rehearsed plan for refugee support.

The commander and his forward headquarters operated between November 19 and 25 in Kigali to consolidate analysis and provide succinct situation briefings to the Rwandan government and relief agencies. This information helped these organizations to further preposition foodstuffs, medical assistance, and other life support along refugee routes. In addition, the local government could focus processing and repatriation efforts on

Goma, the site of most refugee traffic, and also execute an information campaign to update returning refugees. Once refugee information channels were developed through the Rwandan government and humanitarian relief agencies, the main focus of refugee support became collecting and analyzing information on refugees in eastern Zaire.

### Operations around Entebbe

Having identified the information requirement, the task force center of gravity reverted to Entebbe. Concurrently, the Canadian portion of the U.N.-sponsored multinational force had instructions from Ottawa to stand up. Canada was to prepare to lead the force.

JTFGA created an all source information center at Entebbe airport comprised of operations and intelligence analysts and planners, a national intelligence support team, and representatives of every on-site U.S. military reconnaissance asset. This team applied an Army doctrinal intelligence preparation of the battlefield collection methodology to this nonstandard mission.

Each collection asset was aligned against specific intelligence requirements, and the results were integrated daily to portray the size, location, composition, direction of movement, and intent of refugee groups in eastern Zaire. Products of the all source information center were provided to the Canadians, Rwandan government, and available relief agencies. Combined with early activities of the multinational force CMOC, formed in Kampala, collection and dissemination assets became the primary U.S. military contribution to further humanitarian assistance and repatriation efforts.

The task force maintained its headquarters at the intermediate stage base at Entebbe airport. Collocated with it were British and Canadian contingents and the organizational headquarters of regional relief agencies. In addition, many regional offices of relief agencies were located at the airport and in the capital, Kampala, which allowed close coordination through multinational force CMOC. As in 1994 the government provided a large airfield and ground security, which were indispensable in operating a staging area for military air.

### Dèjà Vu

Similarities to Operation Support Hope allowed JTFGA to apply earlier lessons, avoiding some pitfalls while structuring itself to counter unavoidable ones. New conditions in the political and security environments and a different refugee situation led to some new JTF tasks in 1996. The unique military capabilities required were intelligence processing and related information support, civil affairs advice and assistance, and psychological operations advice and assistance. Whereas these same capabilities helped in 1994,



in 1996 they were essential to the government of Rwanda and humanitarian relief agencies.

As in 1994, task force operations were characterized by a rapidly changing environment, simultaneous planning and execution, and challenges posed by multinational operations and coordination with humanitarian relief agencies (with most nations, nongovernmental organizations, and private voluntary organizations having different perspectives).

Unlike 1994, opposing regional political agendas and Zairian army and rebel forces which

were fighting in the joint operational area argued against using U.S. ground forces. Moreover, a massive return of refugees, coupled with the readiness and capability to receive them and provide

life support through the government of Rwanda and relief agencies, precluded the need for a large multinational force.

While JTFGA demonstrated again that the U.S. military can execute contingency response tasks on short notice and render focused assistance, it did so differently than the joint task force in Operation Support Hope. It added a new chapter to the operational and tactical lessons learned two years earlier.

*Humanitarian assistance survey team challenge.* With clear terms of reference provided by CINCEUR, the humanitarian assistance survey team deployed to the area to make an assessment; establish interface with U.S. country teams, the government of Rwanda, and relief agencies; and prepare for follow-on forces. The real challenge was to conduct the assessment accurately and quickly to affect decisionmaking already underway in Washington, New York, and Ottawa.

The humanitarian assistance survey team deployed with subject matter experts—including some with experience from Support Hope—and initially sufficient automation and communications support. The proposed JTF commander led the team to provide added focus. Prior coordination and preparation by U.S. country teams in Kampala and Kigali allowed the survey team to quickly establish a base of operations and interact with government and nongovernment officials to develop assessment media.

Rwanda was stable. The local government and relief agencies had made detailed preparations for refugee repatriation. Two days after the survey

team arrived, refugees from the Mugunga Camp began returning in mass. The situation thus drastically changed and just three days after arrival the team was able to recommend minimum deployment of select, discrete assets to address those identified support requirements which only unique military capabilities could satisfy.

As the survey team leader, the JTF commander built consensus and common understanding of the situation with the American ambassador to Rwanda, members of the Disaster Assistance Relief Team, and other representatives in country from the Departments of State and Defense. Despite common accord that large military capabilities were not necessary, political momentum at the United Nations was already moving toward wider action. Thus the Security Council supported its initial resolution calling for a large multinational military force despite the changed situation.

*Tailoring JTF.* As in 1994, the U.S. joint task force structure was developed around enabling forces and unique military capabilities that civilian alternatives could not immediately supply. Three capabilities were specified: information collection, analysis, and dissemination, civil-military operations support, and psychological operations support.

In the area of tailoring a joint force package to mission requirements, four basic lessons were revalidated. First the commander, working closely with EUCOM and service components supplying forces, had to constantly review, identify, and deploy forward only those elements really needed. Minimum footprint in size and duration of force presence was recognized as the primary way to protect them from start to finish. Flexibility was critical to ensure force flow in and out of the joint operational area by service component forces best suited for each task.

Respect for host nation wishes and ease of disengagement also called for continually tailoring JTFGA. The government of Rwanda made known its desire for a limited presence of foreign forces, both in size and duration, explicit from the start. Further, the government and the relief agencies were soon providing life support needs to returning refugees. With the help of the task force, the local government and regional relief agencies knew how many refugees could still return to Rwanda. They prepositioned stocks and otherwise made preparations to repatriate them. Once it was evident there was no further value added in CMOC and joint psychological operations task force operations in Kigali, the task force forward was redeployed to Entebbe. This gradual

**as the survey team leader, the JTF commander built consensus and common understanding of the situation**



Refugee camp,  
Zaire.

DOD (Andy Dunaway)



Airlift coordination,  
Support Hope.

DOD (Charles Parsley)

handoff of tasks and redeployment of excess capability allowed the commander to avoid dependency by relief agencies on JTFGA support and better protect the force.

The second lesson was that although JTFs by nature will always be more ad hoc than desirable, joint doctrine, training programs, and tactics, techniques, and procedures enable us to deploy packages of capability to execute most contingency missions effectively. This doctrine, added to training on joint operations with allies, again proved invaluable in all interface among

multinational force advanced echelon elements in the joint operational area.

Participation in joint exercises and real world deployments by the SETAF core staff and augmenters after 1996 significantly enhanced the speed and efficiency of planning, deployment, and execution. Furthermore, CINCEUR directed and V Corps supported joint training exercises for SETAF. These took place only weeks prior to the deployment of a humanitarian assistance survey team and paid great dividends.

The third lesson was the importance of quickly deploying humanitarian assistance survey teams or an advanced echelon to the objective area to appraise the ground situation quickly. Team selection must be based on critical skills and functional needs anticipated in the joint operational area. Members of the JTF core staff are usually the most accessible for the humanitarian assistance survey team and facilitate the transition to subsequent operations. The proposed JTF commander should lead the team to ensure that a comprehensive assessment brings the best force package to the mission. In contrast to 1994, the inclusion of the deputy director of mobility on the survey team helped ensure



smoother deployment and sufficient visibility and control of the airlift flow.

Finally, placing JTF members and equipment forward with other select advanced echelon assets on the survey team greatly eases transition to full operations, allowing quick establishment of command and control and the efficient reception and integration of follow-on forces.

### Task Force Roles

Understanding and dominating the information environment during fast-moving, chaotic, and ill-defined contingency operations is critical. As in 1994 information proved to be the greatest challenge. The focus of the information campaign was painting an accurate picture of the refugee situation (ground truth) by quantifying elements such as size, location, composition, direction of movement, and refugee intent—the hardest to verify. JTFGA spent considerable effort in setting up precise systems to report on the dynamic situation on the ground and communicate it to higher headquarters as well

as the relief agencies, local government, multinational force, and media.

Information gathering followed the basic doctrinal approach. The principles of intelligence preparation of the battlefield and targeting methodology (decide, detect, deliver, and assess) were followed in creating the collection plan. Analysts and planners from J-2, J-3 (national intelligence support team), and J-5, supported by intelligence officers from the air reconnaissance platforms, assessed collection daily and recommended the collection plan for the next 24-hour period through a formal decision brief.

Off-site information was also leveraged to support collection or inject further requirements. For example, CMOC provided information or referred questions from humanitarian relief agencies while regional defense attachés furnished input from area governments and the national intelligence support team gave access to other information sources. The collection platforms used a variety of aircraft (P-3s, Canberras, and AC-130s) which were the most advanced and suitable available.

Information dissemination involved many players. Some interfaced in CMOC settings and others directly with the task force. Tailored products were designed for specific target audiences and graphic intelligence summaries, overhead imagery, information briefings, and periodic trend and refugee flow analyses were all used to portray refugee status.

Although this daily information dissemination was welcomed by most, it was contested by some. Overhead photography, albeit difficult to refute, did not eliminate exaggerated reports of refugee concentrations by the United Nations and other agencies, at least initially. Moreover, the various target audiences had differing perceptions of military requirements. While some contested the data for parochial reasons, most believed the military had the best means to provide an objective and accurate assessment of refugee group sizes and locations.

Central African governments, the regional media, and JTF itself agreed during the initial phase that the military could contribute significantly. As time passed, however, each party determined that the unique military capabilities were less and less necessary to the long-term humanitarian and repatriation requirements. The major contribution of the task force remained providing timely and accurate refugee information to the local government and relief agencies.

Another key task force role was advisory assistance. The object was to improve existing capabilities of the Rwandan government and relief agencies. As was learned in 1994, the operative terms were assist, facilitate, coach, teach, advise, reinforce, and leverage. These were repeatedly stressed in CINCEUR and JTF commander intent statements. A multifunctional pool of expertise allowed JTFGA to play this role. CMOC included both civil affairs and non-civil affairs officers with technical expertise (engineering, logistics, administration, medical) and extensive experience in both Africa and humanitarian operations. Two played key roles in 1994.

Members of the Kigali CMOC also reinforced the information flow between the Rwandan government and relief agencies. They ensured task force offerings were shared and identified coordination inefficiencies. The all source information center also tailored products to provide refugee information in the right detail and format for the local government and relief agencies. Moreover, CMOCs in Kigali and later Kampala played key roles in disseminating these analyses by both explaining and interpreting them, then assessing how well the information was understood. CMOC feedback allowed the task force to track crisis perception by the Rwandan government and relief agencies.

Civil affairs and psychological operations mobile training teams already deployed in theater were another benefit. They had worked with the Rwandan Patriotic Army toward the repatriation and social integration of Rwandan refugees. Their timing was perfect. Practical exercises by the

**force protection training began prior to deployment and continued on arrival at the intermediate stage base**

teams included visits to border crossings and communes where refugees were arriving. The teams in Rwanda had developed concrete programs to support efforts by both the government and relief agencies to receive refugees.

Force protection training—the top priority of CINCEUR—began prior to deployment and continued on arrival at the intermediate stage base. It covered threats in the joint operational area, environmental hazards, preventive measures, safety, sensitive items checks, physical and operations security measures, and individual/leader discipline and responsibility. With the joint task force, an Air Force-led force protection working group at Entebbe airport, supplemented by daily surveys of living and working areas, maintained constant focus. It used training materials developed by U.S. Army Europe and tailored to the joint operational area. Periodic briefings, inspections, and daily command emphasis on caution reduced illness and injury.

Furthermore, the top priority of the commander remained the identification of air defense threats (location, capability, association, and intent) against JTF air reconnaissance platforms over eastern Zaire. While no specific threat was isolated despite indications, the early establishment of an air operations cell to produce an air tasking order and solid air control measures reduced risks with the coordination of minimum altitude no-flyover of combat areas, diplomatic clearances, and monitoring of flights with the government of Rwanda.

Finally, Rwanda used the lack of a status of forces agreement to deter the establishment of a multinational force in country. Despite considerable effort by the JTF staff judge advocate and the ambassador and defense attaché in Kigali, the government avoided an agreement and failed to provide administrative protection to task force members. Thus the commander redeployed forward

elements in Kigali to Entebbe as soon as their work was complete, a vital part of force protection.

The Armed Forces are uniquely suited to undertake crisis assessment and response. Joint doctrine and training prepare them for a range of operations on short notice. Joint exercises and operations increasingly facilitate the full spectrum of warfighting and peace support operations with precisely tailored modular packages. Force projection capabilities allow the Nation to rapidly deploy those packages to crisis areas.

Does this mean that a military force package should be the contingency response of choice? Not necessarily. A number of considerations suggest caution in using our forces for humanitarian assistance crisis responses (particularly where support may become long-term).

Costs associated with protracted peace support operations may degrade warfighting skills. Constantly employing the Armed Forces may atrophy other instruments of national power that are better suited to respond to certain crises.

The military may not always have a say in this process, but they should endeavor to help those who do to understand trade-offs in using U.S. forces for nonwarfighting problems. Mobile training teams that assist relief agencies, for example, may improve operations and reduce military involvement in future humanitarian crises. Advice in peace-support operations, through continuing peacetime engagement strategies around the world, should be wisely applied.

Many soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen have learned valuable problem-solving skills. Training has given them the ability to apply their service, functional, and technical expertise. They have proven highly effective in responding to a wide range of crises around the world. **JFQ**